

Bulletin of the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club Inc.

October 1996,
Editor; Don Hird.

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The Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club encourages the study of natural history and supports conservation. We issue our journal, the *Tasmanian Naturalist*, annually in October. People with a range of backgrounds and knowledge are welcome as members.

Contact Don Hird (344 293) for further excursion details or more information, or write to GPO Box 68A Hobart, 7001.

Program

General meetings start at 7.45pm on the first Thursday of the month in the Life Science Building at the University of Tasmania. Outings are usually held the following Saturday or Sunday, meeting at 10am outside the main entrance to the Museum in MacQuarie Street. If you're attending an outing but not the meeting prior, check as to the timing of the excursion; sometimes unforeseen late changes may occur.

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| 07 November | Members' Night : Orchids; Several speakers will give short talks around this theme. Bring any orchid observations or exhibits and wear your favourite orchid T-shirt etc.
(The ANZAAS Public Lecture scheduled for this timeslot in the last Bulletin has been postponed until March '97) |
| 08-10 November | Lune River & Southeast Weekend: see page three for details. |
| 05 December | Phil Collier (Author of <i>Alpine Plants of Tasmania- a Plant Identikit</i>) will present an illustrated talk entitled 'Continents Apart- the Differences Between Alpine Plants of Europe and Australia.'

According to our tradition, please bring a plate of Christmas supper to the December meeting. |
| 07 December | 9 a.m. Meet at the Museum for a Saturday excursion to Hartz Mountains. This will be an alpine outing to look at the wildflowers [and frogs, ed.] of the South. Bring all-weather gear and strong footwear. Leader Phil Collier (62 296 597). |
| 22-24 November | Survey Weekend on Betsy Island; see page two for details. |
| December TBA | Survey on King Island; see page three for details. |
| January | No meeting in January (as usual). |

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| New Members: | A special welcome to Kerry Sackett, and to Yvonne Hill and Lyndon Brown. |
| Subs. Due Now. | Details page three. |

Outing Reports

Federation Report: St Helens 20-22 September 1996.

This Federation meeting was hosted by the North-East Field Naturalists at the recommended Queechy Cottages. An outing I attended to Rayner's Hill resulted in some significant millipede finds, a mountain funnelweb and giant velvetworms. Two landsnail range extensions were *Discocharopa mimosa* by 28km and *Roblinella curacaoe* by 95km.

Other excursions were to Humbug Point and the Winifred Curtis Reserve at Scamander. Orchids were scarce but a grand display of several thousand *Diurus lanceolata* and some *D. pardina* with many intriguing hybrids was much admired by the 20 delegates.

A lively evening discussion on the PLUC RFA process was followed by slides of Mt. Chappell Island. The overlong business meeting approved a new constitution, and the Marine Nats as members. The yellow-throated honeyeater was nominated as the "bird emblem" despite light-hearted claims of "vertebratism" (!). Burnie Field Nats reported on a crayfish endemic to three degraded streams in the city.

The next meeting (AGM) will be at "Carnacoo" Scout Camp, West Tamar 7-9 March 1997. Kevin Bonham, Delegate.

Excursion Report: Whalers' Lookout via Rheban, 07 September 1996.

John Reid led this walk on the east coast north of Hellfire Bluff. Much of the coast is on the Earham property, from whom permission was obtained.

An early sighting was of large grey birds not usually associated with this area; Cape Barren Geese that have colonised the area following their introduction to nearby Maria Island in the 1970s. Two adults and a younger bird were seen. Initially we walked through pasture. Coastal vegetation was reduced to a narrow fringe of trees, mostly blue gums and boobyalla, often in a state of dieback and subsidence from coastal erosion. Earham tier, a kilometre or so west, is still treed as was our target some seven kilometres to the south. Fine views of Maria Island across Mercury Passage were obtained and gannets and terns were observed fishing. Sea eagles were also seen on several occasions as was a wedge-tail.

Lunch was taken on a small headland above a 10 metre dolerite cliff. By this time our target of Whaler's Lookout was clearly out of reach for the day and a decision was taken to fossick in the area and save the lookout for another day. Slightly to the south a patch of much lighter coloured rock on the cliffs proved to be a small sandstone outcrop on consultation with a geomap. Middens were eroding into the sea on the cliff edge. Flame robins were active around the lunch sight and nearer to Rheban both noisy miners and swift parrots (perhaps newly returned from their mainland winter) were seen foraging in occasional blue gum blossoms. Priscilla Park and Mary Beadle reported Hooded Plover from beaches around Orford.

This excursion was enjoyed by about 15 people, in four cars. The area closer to Whalers' Lookout appears to be of more natural history interest than that visited, and includes a coastal lagoon at Cockle Bay, but needs at least a full day's walk.

A disappointing aspect was that on checking the 1:25 000 map on our return, a Coastal Reserve of some 100 metres width is marked, but there is no evidence of this unproclaimed reserve on the ground. This sort of situation is all too frequent around our coast.

General News.

Betsy Island Excursion: this is a supplementary excursion to run from Friday November 22-24 (afternoon and evening departures ex South Arm Jetty, timed by arrangement; returning afternoon of 24th.). It is to be a survey weekend, looking at mammals and other vertebrates, and inverts, plants, comets and more.

Bring all-weather gear, strong footwear and all food and water for 2-3 days. This is a close but isolated venue, self-sufficiency is a must. Physical ability to disembark in shallows is required. Leader Don Hird (62 344 293). If somebody can bring a mobile phone (strictly for emergency use only) this would be very useful.

Reminder: 1997 Subs Due Now ! Membership fees are due in advance by the end of the Calendar Year. Our modest rates are Adults \$20, Families \$25, Concession / Junior \$15. Members receive four *Bulletins* per year and the *Tasmanian Naturalist* journal annually in October.

Lune River Weekend: November 8-10 1996

Accommodation is available at Lune River Youth Hostel. Cost is \$12 per night for non-members; members \$10, with concessions for children. You will need a Youth Hostels sheet liner-; these can be hired from the hostel for \$2-50 per night. There is plenty of camping in the hostel grounds; cost is \$7 per night for non-members; members \$5. Bring all food for weekend including BYO BBQ on Saturday evening.

Saturday: meet at Lune River YHA at 10 a.m. We will catch the Ida Bay train to The Deep Hole (\$11 return, concession for families). The heathland should be alive with orchids and other wildflowers. Possibly swimming for the hardy.

Sunday: weather permitting we drive to Cockle Creek (the road may be a little rough) and walk to South Cape Bay. The walk is about 16km return and fairly flat. For members not going on the walk there are some areas of seashore to explore at Cockle Creek. Bring all-weather gear and strong footwear.

Members and visitors are welcome to join us either for the whole weekend or for either day. Anyone coming for the Sunday only please check with the leader for starting time from Lune River. Car pooling will need to be arranged prior to the weekend; no rendezvous in Hobart but transport will be available by arrangement. Bookings for accommodation or camping to Sue Collier (62 296 597) by Thurs 07 November.

King Island December Excursion.

This is another supplementary excursion, in December. In conjunction with Lyn Forster and family of Cygnet, who are visiting King Island for the month, we are organising mammal and other survey activities. Participants would need to make their own arrangements regarding travel and accommodation, but some help with camping and/or limited transport may be available.

King Island has suffered from massive deforestation but, despite 1080 campaigns against browsing and grazing marsupials, still probably holds potoroo populations. Identification of such populations with a view to their conservation is a principal aim of the exercise. There is also a valuable isolated platypus population on the island, as noted in the 1995 *Naturalist*. Losses to the King Island fauna include its unique wombat and emu (early in the nineteenth century) and, almost certainly, quolls in recent decades. The water rat appears to be naturally absent from King Island.

Don Hird (62 344 293) will coordinate this survey program, in consultation with Lyn Forster. Exact dates are yet to be finalised and probably flexible. We are organising the project with Tasmanian Museum and Parks and Wildlife.

Timelines Australia Project:

Compilation of seasonal calendars for local natural events is the aim of this project, coordinated by Alan Reid and the Gould League of Victoria. Such calendars are important in the oral tradition of Aboriginal Australians in parts of northern Australia, but they are generally lost to our natural heritage elsewhere. Tasmania seems especially conducive to this sort of documentation, with its insular nature in relatively high latitudes and many migrant species.

Alan Reid will be conducting a workshop on Timelines in Hobart in January in conjunction with the conference of the Aust. Assoc. for Environmental Education. For preliminary information please phone Susanna van Essen or Anna March (002) 345 566 at the Tas Environment Centre.

Conservation Angle.

Recent months have seen some conservation concerns resurface. The Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) process has been to the fore, and is due to be completed by later this year. Initially we applauded the RFA concept as at last acknowledging that comprehensive and adequate reservation of species is appropriate, even though the concept has been late in officially arriving here. We don't wish to condemn the process out of hand, but from our point of view RFA seems to be making some tired old mistakes and creating some new ones.

As with other conservation issues in Tasmania we have long advocated, including to RFA administration, a Conservation Council that would represent the diversity of stakeholders including committed conservation groups. Current processes seem intent on calling for submissions or organising "discussion groups" but both of these often turn out to be black holes from which our views, let alone answers or solutions, don't emerge. There is no substitute for real dialogue. Conservation issues have for too long had a sorry local history of strident ongoing disagreement.

Conservation can be achieved in many different ways. Some traditional and obvious methods don't work, or at least not with reasonable efficiency. For example, its no longer enough to declare a species "protected" if its habitat is disappearing. Having many fine National Parks, as we do, doesn't in itself guarantee comprehensive and adequate conservation if many important species and habitats are not represented in them (as they aren't). Dialogue on these sorts of issue are badly needed and without them denial becomes too easy.

From the conservation angle there is a disappointing lack of solidarity. A recent example was a meeting I attended organised by the Tas. Conservation Trust entitled "Why Are There So Many Conservation Groups?". The problem was that only satellites of the Trust were invited to address the worthwhile question, that is, it wasn't an inclusive discussion. This sort of sectarianism gives conservation a bad name. Nobody looking at the record of this club could dismiss us as a community group with a strong conservation focus. Nonetheless we consistently hear, more often in headlines than in considered discussion, that there is "a conservation movement" in Tasmania. This is apparently the same group that boycotted the last round of forestry discussions in the early 1990s. We don't disagree with all of their views, but plurality of outlook is essential.

Some say we don't need more conservation. I have written, as an individual, to the Forest Protection Society asking about their membership, rules, and mode of operation. I received only a wad of hype about how much the forests will be improved by more woodchipping, but nothing about the democratic processes of what masquerades as a community group. Their meetings are apparently BBQs ! This contrived, flimsy and fraudulent "Society" is heavily industry-funded and appears to act only as an industry PR mouthpiece.

Recently I received two invitations to attend RFA "Community Workshops". Both were at Campbelltown, at short notice, of some hours length, and in the middle of the day (one on a weekend). Neither had a written agenda. In both cases we were earnestly urged to attend but when pressed as to the content and substance of the sessions detail was lacking. At first I demurred on the grounds that we have expressed our views often enough in writing (they hadn't looked at any of this), although I succumbed to the first invitation. The session was obviously part of a very expensive process, with expense-account consultants leading the discussion, but my overall impression was that it was extraordinarily naive. The leaders seemed to know little about strategic biological conservation, questions were of the "How would you feel if there was more / less clearfelling?" nature. Nothing in these issues is that simple.

The independence of the administration of RFA is also of real concern. Our natural heritage should be managed in full consultation with its community of interest, not just by those managing or apologising for its usual threatening processes. The documentation of strategic conservation for Tasmania is patchy and often sparse. It appears that lip service will be paid to public consultation by RFA, but predominantly on an simplistic and anecdotal basis and with people who haven't demonstrated a long-standing commitment to the issues.

The whole process seems out of balance. Money is poured into PR exercises that won't resolve the deeper issues. Does this sound like history revisited ?
